

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to you to express our shock and outrage over recent reporting that senior officials in your State Department attended and spoke at a forum in which a known and active terrorist was featured as a speaker. The presence of Alina Romanowski, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, and Barbara Leaf, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, sends a message to this Iraqi-born terrorist that his attendance at international conferences is legitimate.

Qais Hadi Sayed Hasan al-Khazali, the terrorist prominently featured at this event attended by high-ranking U.S. officials, has served in various terrorist organizations since at least 2003 and is responsible for the death of dozens of American soldiers. He is known to have directed and coordinated the attack on American forces in Karbala on January 20, 2007 that resulted in five American soldiers dead and three wounded. Qais al-Khazali is also responsible for the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on December 31, 2019. For these actions, among others, Qais al-Khazali was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department on December 6, 2019 for “involvement in serious human rights abuse in Iraq” and designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on January 3, 2020.

Currently, Qais al-Khazali is Secretary-General of Asa'id Ahl al-Haw (AAH), also known as the Khazali Network, a radical Iraqi Shi'a political party and paramilitary group that is funded, trained, and equipped by Iran's Quds Force and Hezbollah. The AAH claimed responsibility for over 6,000 attacks on U.S.-led coalition forces between 2006 and 2011, including the roadside bomb that killed the last American soldier to die before the U.S. withdrawal in November 2011. This group was labeled a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) on January 3, 2020.

To the American, allied and partner soldiers who fought valiantly against AAH and other groups affiliated with al-Khazali, the State Department's casual attitude toward supporting and attending a conference that promotes a leading terrorist is beyond unacceptable. Notification of Qais al-Khazali's participation in the conference is clearly stated on the Conference's public website, as part of a session titled “State-building in the Eyes of Iraq's Political Leaders: Open Debates.”¹

We are gravely concerned about the precedent this sets and insist that the State Department take immediate action to ensure American officials under your purview do not give credibility to events that feature enemies of the United States.

- 1) Did the State Department receive an agenda for this event prior to Ambassador Romanowski and Assistant Secretary Leaf committing to attend?
- 2) Was the U.S. Embassy in Iraq or the State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security aware of Qais al-Khazali's participation at the conference, and if so did they engage in any pre-event security briefings or make any alternate arrangements to Ambassador Romanowski and Assistant Secretary Leaf's

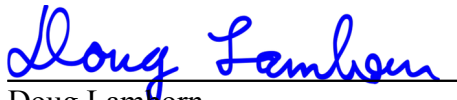
¹ Iraq Forum 2023. *Provisional Programme*. Iraq Forum (May 2. 2023).

participation because of the presence of Qais al-Khazali? If not, what measures is the State Department taking to ensure an oversight of this magnitude does not occur again?

- 3) Understanding that the State Department has asserted that Ambassador Romanowski and Assistant Secretary Leaf were not present at the conference on the day Qais al-Khazali was a keynote speaker, can you confirm that:
 - a. Neither Ambassador Romanowski nor Assistant Secretary Leaf interacted with Qais al-Khazali or any of his affiliates during their time at the conference?
 - b. No other State Department official was present at the conference on May 3rd, the day of Qais al-Khazali's scheduled remarks?
 - c. There were no interactions between Qais al-Khazali, or any of his affiliates, and any State Department official at the conference?
- 4) Is the State Department treating this as a security incident, and investigating it accordingly?
- 5) Does the Biden Administration plan to send U.S. officials to any future forums, meetings, or gatherings in which known terrorists are present? What precautions will the State Department take moving forward to ensure that issues like this do not occur again?

We appreciate your attention to this serious security incident, and look forward to your response no later than 30 days following receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,



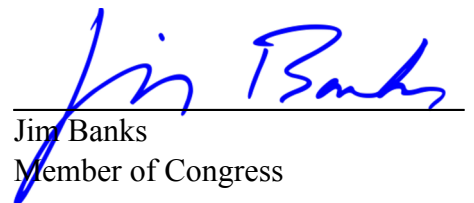
Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



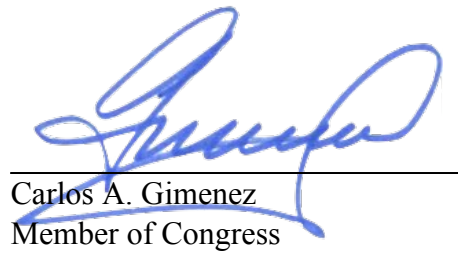
Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman
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Jim Banks
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
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